

# Marklein says bill aims to help communities impacted by UW closures

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Sen. Howard Marklein says his bill to provide grants to communities that lose UW campuses would offer counties a potential economic development opportunity by helping them repurpose old facilities.

The Spring Green Republican during yesterday's Economic Development and Technical Colleges Committee meeting warned campuses in Washington and Fond du Lac "may not be the last two-year campuses that may be facing this situation."

SB 518 came after the closure of UW-Platteville Richland. The Universities of Wisconsin has since decided to end in-person instruction at UW-Oshkosh Fond du Lac and UW-Milwaukee Washington County.

In all, the bill would provide \$12 million for the grants, with half earmarked for those three communities. The rest would be available if any other campuses are closed.

"When the UW walks in and drops the keys on the desk and says 'We're out of here,' the obligation for maintaining those buildings continues," Marklein said. "And ... there's probably some very worthwhile opportunities for those counties that, you know, it's going to take some upfront money to get us there."

Sen. Lena Taylor said she hoped for "the same kind of thought process" toward facilities in her district, including a Department of Natural Resources building near her district that she said is "sitting in limbo."

"I hear you ... I just don't know if just doing it for Richmond or, like, demanding that it's done for Richmond before it can be done for anywhere else is [an] equitable or fair process," the Milwaukee Dem said.

The original version of the bill includes a requirement that Richland County receive a \$2 million grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. for costs

associated with the redevelopment of buildings or other sites on the campus.

Marklein then introduced an amendment to require \$2 million grants each to Fond du Lac and Washington counties after the system announced plans to shut down two-year campuses there as well.

Washington County Exec Josh Schoemann told the committee “both demographically and fiscally, these two-year campuses are really unsustainable.”

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